

# *Playing around with* **NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE**

## *A Writing Lesson*

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# CONTENTS

## STEP-BY-STEP LESSON PLAN

A step-by-step plan to guide you through the lesson.

## NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE HANDOUT

A one-page handout on narrative perspective in literature; this can be projected onto the board to discuss in class, or printed for students to keep in their books/files.

## ANALYZING NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE

A short worksheet to help draw out students' knowledge of the three different narrative perspectives  
+ Answer Key

## LET'S PLAY AROUND WITH NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE

The lesson requires students to write three versions of the same narrative, playing around with perspective. This is a planning page to help guide students.

# Thank You!



I hope that this lesson proves useful to your students, & that you enjoy teaching it. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or queries, and know that feedback is always appreciated.



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**HAVE YOU CHECKED OUT THESE RESOURCES?**



# Lesson Plan

This lesson focuses on analyzing the importance of narrative perspective, and then helping students put their knowledge into practice in their own writing.

## WRITING FROM DIFFERENT NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVES

### PRE-LESSON PLANNING

- ☐ Print and copy the following worksheets (one per student):
  - » Narrative Perspective HANDOUT (optional)
  - » Analyzing the Narrative Perspective
  - » Let's Play with Narrative Perspective Planning Page

### EQUIPMENT REQUIRED

- Worksheets
- Board
- Music
- Equipment to play music

### CLASSROOM LAYOUT

Desks  
arranged  
in pairs

## STEP-BY-STEP PLAN



**DISCUSS** the term 'narrative perspective'.

*You may want to use the following questions to help guide the discussion:*

- » What do you know about narrative perspective?
- » What types of narrator can you list?
- » How does the narrative perspective influence the story?
- » How might the narrative perspective affect characterization, plot, and theme?
- » What's your favorite novel? What's the narrative perspective of it? How does it contribute to the story-telling?

*You may want to write 'narrative perspective' on the board, and then mind-map students' answers to these discussion questions.*

[ **[OPTIONAL] HAND OUT** the Narrative Perspective Notes Page for students to keep in their notebooks/files for studying or reference. Or just use it to guide your discussion. ]



**HAND OUT** the 'Analyzing the Narrative Perspective' worksheet and instruct students to get into pairs to discuss and complete this worksheet together.



**REVIEW** and **DISCUSS** the worksheet as a class, making sure that students discussed all aspects of the exercise - *a suggested answer key has been included to help guide the discussion.*



**EXPLAIN** to the class that they are now going to be putting their knowledge into practice with their own writing piece - they will **pick a situation involving two characters** (for example: an elderly couple paddling down a river; two brothers working on a car together; two friends attempting to build a snowman etc.), and **then write three paragraphs** about the exact same situation, but one from each of the characters' perspective, and then a third from the perspective of an omniscient narrator.

*NOTE: The Planning Worksheet does give students all of the instructions required.*



**HAND OUT** the Let's Play with Narrative Perspective Planning Page to students and instruct them to work through these on their own, which will help them plan their writing pieces.



**INSTRUCT** students to start writing their actual pieces once they have successfully completed the planning stage.

*Ideally, play some gentle music in the background whilst students are working through this, as it will help to keep their focus and limit distractions.*

*This should take the remainder of the lesson. & probably also will require students to complete for homework.*

### If there is still time, or for a second lesson...

Have students exchange stories and peer edit. Also have a class discussion about which versions students found to be the most effective and why.

# THINKING ABOUT THE NARRATOR

The narrator is an extremely important element in a work of literature. He/she is the lens through which we view all of the characters and action.

## Narrative Point-of-View

← Narrative point of view in literature describes the narrator's position in relation to the story being told. There are 3 broad types of narrator.

### 1 First-Person Narrator

In a first-person narrative, the story is revealed through a narrator who is also a **character within the story**. First-person narration is easy to identify, because the narrator will be telling the story from his/her perspective and therefore will use the pronoun "I" or "we".



Although the first-person narrator is **usually** the protagonist, it is not always. In Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes*, Watson (Sherlock's sidekick) is the narrator.

**NOTE:** Usually, the reader trusts the first-person narrator. However, in some narratives, the first-person narrator can be an **unreliable narrator**. That is, a narrator who can't really be trusted. Either from ignorance or self-interest, this narrator speaks with a bias, makes mistakes, or even lies. One of the most famous unreliable narrators is Holden from J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*.

**ADVANTAGE OF USING A FIRST-PERSON NARRATOR:** Creates an intimacy between the narrator and reader; the reader gains insight into the thoughts and feelings of the narrating character.

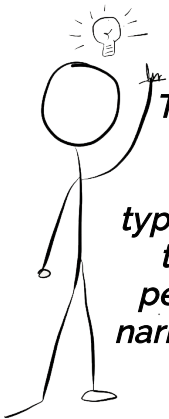
### 2 Second-Person Narrator

A second-person narrator uses the pronoun 'you' to address the reader directly. It is rarely used in literature as it forces the reader into being a 'character' in the story (which they may be reluctant to be!) However, it is used in guide books, recipes, business presentations etc.

**ADVANTAGE OF USING A SECOND-PERSON NARRATOR:** The narrator is able to speak directly to the reader in order to instruct or teach.

### 3 Third-Person Narrator

The narrator is **not a character in the story**, but he/she is an observer who tells the reader the thoughts and feelings of one, most, or all, of the characters in the story. The third-person narrator will use pronouns such as "he", "she", "them" etc.



There are 3 main types of third-person narrator.

- » 3<sup>rd</sup>-Person OBJECTIVE: The narrator tells a third-person's story (he, she, him, her), but the narrator **only** describes characters' actions and dialogue - the narrator **does not** reveal any character's thoughts or feelings.
- » 3<sup>rd</sup>-Person LIMITED: The narrator's view is limited to the internal workings of **one character (usually the protagonist)**. The narrator reveals the thoughts and feelings of this character, but no others.
- » 3<sup>rd</sup>-Person OMNISCIENT: The word *omniscient* roughly means '**all knowing**' - therefore the omniscient narrator is one who narrates the thoughts and feelings of many (or all) of the different characters in a story.

**NOTE:** The third-person narrator is **not** necessarily the voice of the author. The narrator, even a third-person one, can be a sort of 'created character' in their own right. You must not assume that the thoughts and views of the narrator are those of the author, and when talking or writing about the narrative, you shouldn't say, "J.K. Rowling says that...", you should say, "The narrator says that..."

**ADVANTAGE OF USING A THIRD-PERSON NARRATOR:** The reader is able to gain insight into the thoughts, feelings and actions of multiple characters.

The point of view from which a story is told, and the voice of the narrator, is extremely important. Think about how different the story of Cinderella would be if it were told from the perspective of one of the ugly stepsisters.



# Analyzing the Narrative Perspective



Read each of the following extracts from famous fiction, and then complete the analysis of the narrator.

‘THE CATCHER IN THE RYE’ BY J.D. SALINGER

If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth. In the first place, that stuff bores me, and in the second place, my parents would have about two hemorrhages apiece if I told anything pretty personal about them. They're quite touchy about anything like that, especially my father. They're nice and all -- I'm not saying that -- but they're also touchy as hell. Besides, I'm not going to tell you my whole goddam autobiography or anything. I'll just tell you about this madman stuff that happened to me around last Christmas just before I got pretty run-down and had to come out here and take it easy.

**NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**HOW DO YOU KNOW?** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**WHAT IS THE EFFECT?** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_

‘LITTLE WOMEN’ BY LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

‘I'll try and be what he loves to call me, ‘a little woman’ and not be rough and wild, but do my duty here instead of wanting to be somewhere else,’ said Jo, thinking that keeping her temper at home was a much harder task than facing a rebel or two down South.

Beth said nothing, but wiped away her tears with the blue army sock and began to knit with all her might, losing no time in doing the duty that lay nearest her, while she resolved in her quiet little soul to be all that Father hoped to find her when the year brought round the happy coming home.

Mrs. March broke the silence that followed Jo's words, by saying in her cheery voice, ‘Do you remember how you used to play Pilgrims Progress when you were little things?...’

**NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**HOW DO YOU KNOW?** \_\_\_\_\_  
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**WHAT IS THE EFFECT?** \_\_\_\_\_  
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‘EMMA’ BY JANE AUSTEN

They walked together. He was silent. She thought he was often looking at her, and trying for a fuller view of her face than it suited her to give. And this belief produced another dread. Perhaps he wanted to speak to her, of his attachment to Harriet; he might be watching for encouragement to begin.—She did not, could not, feel equal to lead the way to any such subject. He must do it all himself. Yet she could not bear this silence. With him it was most unnatural. She considered—resolved—and, trying to smile, began—

“You have some news to hear, now you are come back, that will rather surprise you.”

“Have I?” said he quietly, and looking at her; “of what nature?”

“Oh! the best nature in the world—a wedding.”

**NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**HOW DO YOU KNOW?** \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**WHAT IS THE EFFECT?** \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Analyzing the Narrative Perspective

Read each of the following extracts from famous fiction, and then complete the analysis.

## SUGGESTED ANSWER KEY

'THE CATCHER IN THE RYE' BY J.D. SALINGER

If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth. In the first place, that stuff bores me, and in the second place, my parents would have about two hemorrhages apiece if I told anything pretty personal about them. They're quite touchy about anything like that, especially my father. They're nice and all -- I'm not saying that -- but they're also touchy as hell. Besides, I'm not going to tell you my whole goddam autobiography or anything. I'll just tell you about this madman stuff that happened to me around last Christmas just before I got pretty run-down and had to come out here and take it easy.

**NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE:** First-Person Narrator

**HOW DO YOU KNOW?**

In this extract, the narrator uses the personal pronoun 'I', and is a character in the novel, narrating the story from his perspective. He even goes so far as to address the reader directly as 'you'.

Here, the reader can clearly gain insight into the thoughts, feelings and emotions of the main character - we can a very honest, candid version of events. It certainly helps with characterization as we hear the very distinct, personal, abrupt voice of the narrator.

**WHAT IS THE EFFECT?**

'LITTLE WOMEN' BY LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

'I'll try and be what he loves to call me, 'a little woman' and not be rough and wild, but do my duty here instead of wanting to be somewhere else,' said Jo, thinking that keeping her temper at home was a much harder task than facing a rebel or two down South.

Beth said nothing, but wiped away her tears with the blue army sock and began to knit with all her might, losing no time in doing the duty that lay nearest her, while she resolved in her quiet little soul to be all that Father hoped to find her when the year brought round the happy coming home.

Mrs. March broke the silence that followed Jo's words, by saying in her cheery voice, 'Do you remember how you used to play Pilgrims Progress when you were little things?...

**NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE:** Third-Person Narrator Omniscient

**HOW DO YOU KNOW?**

The narrator uses the possessive adjectives 'her', and narrates the action from a distance. Moreover, the narrator knows, and communicates what all the different characters are thinking and feeling.

The omniscient narrator here helps to give a more unbiased view of the situation. This gives the reader a very balanced view of the action. However, as we gain insight into the minds of all the characters, we have a deepening characterization of all of them.

**WHAT IS THE EFFECT?**

'EMMA' BY JANE AUSTEN

They walked together. He was silent. She thought he was often looking at her, and trying for a fuller view of her face than it suited her to give. And this belief produced another dread. Perhaps he wanted to speak to her, of his attachment to Harriet; he might be watching for encouragement to begin.—She did not, could not, feel equal to lead the way to any such subject. He must do it all himself. Yet she could not bear this silence. With him it was most unnatural. She considered—resolved—and, trying to smile, began—

"You have some news to hear, now you are come back, that will rather surprise you."

"Have I?" said he quietly, and looking at her; "of what nature?"

"Oh! the best nature in the world—a wedding."

**NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE:** Third-Person Narrator Limited

**HOW DO YOU KNOW?**

The narrator uses the pronouns "they", "he" and "she" but also has knowledge of, and narrates the innermost thoughts of one of the characters (the female), and not the other (hence 'limited').

The fact that it is closely narrated from one character's perspective, helps to create intimacy between the reader and the protagonist. However, whilst still narrating from a distance to give a more objective perspective of the action and events.

**WHAT IS THE EFFECT?**



You are going to write THREE VERSIONS OF THE SAME PARAGRAPH about two characters in a situation of your choosing. In each, you are going to play around with narrative perspective. Follow the instructions below.

STEP ONE

WHO & WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO WRITE ABOUT? PICK TWO CHARACTERS AND GIVE THEM A SITUATION.

Who are your two characters?	Time of day	You are to write a paragraph about this situation, briefly detail the actions you will include
What is their relationship?	Location	
What activity are they engaged in?	Mood	

STEP TWO

PLANING CHARACTER ONE'S PIECE:

You are going to write ONE paragraph about this situation as a **FIRST-PERSON NARRATIVE** from the perspective of the first character. Plan this piece here:

Name	Age	Gender
Appearance:	Personality:	
Feelings about CHARACTER TWO:		
Thoughts and emotions about the situation:		

STEP THREE

PLANING CHARACTER TWO'S PIECE:

You are going to write ONE paragraph about the same situation as a **FIRST-PERSON NARRATIVE** from the perspective of the second character. Plan this piece here:

Name	Age	Gender
Appearance:	Personality:	
Feelings about CHARACTER ONE:		
Thoughts and emotions about the situation:		

STEP FOUR

PLANING YOUR THIRD VERSION OF THE PARAGRAPH:

You are also going to write ONE version of the same event as a **THIRD-PERSON OMNISCIENT NARRATOR**.

How will you convey the thoughts and feelings of the characters?	How will the shift in narrator change things?	Plan this piece here:

STEP FIVE

NOW IT IS TIME TO GET WRITING! REMEMBER, THE FOLLOWING:

- 1) Write a paragraph detailing an event/action/situation from the perspective of one of the characters involved.
- 2) Write another version, re-writing the paragraph from the perspective of the other character involved.
- 2) Finally write the thrid version of the paragraph from the perspective of an omniscient narrator.